

A 'new frontier' for cruise design



Chinese yards have not built cruise ships before – therefore Tomas Tillberg Design was hired by SunStone Ships to deliver the interior a modern cruise ship should have (credit: SunStone Ships)

Tomas Tillberg Design's managing partner explains the impact of passenger ship building in China, new materials and technology trends on cruise ship and ferry interior design

Using Chinese shipyards to build cruise ships is a “new frontier” for the cruise ship market, said Tomas Tillberg Design managing partner Tomas Tillberg.

And this is a man who knows – his father Robert established the company more than 55 years ago, and he has been working for the firm since he was 18 years old. Mr Tillberg told *Passenger Ship Interior & Refurbishment Review* “Our company, throughout the years, has always been at the forefront of the cruise ship industry. From early on, my father helped to develop the cruise ferry concept in Scandinavia as well as the design of the first Caribbean cruise ships.”

He said this led to other firsts, such as Princess Cruise Line's *Love Boat*, well known as a TV series which helped boost the cruise industry as a whole.

Mr Tillberg emphasised “We have worked with most of the major cruise lines and ventured

into Asia more than 20 years ago. Recently we designed the largest, most prestigious cruise ferry built in South Korea for the Tunisian client Cotunav.” This 3,200-passenger ferry runs between Tunisia, Marseille and Genoa.

Building in China

“Now, once again, our company is leading the way with cruise ship building in China,” Mr Tillberg said.

Tomas Tillberg Design is heavily involved in building cruise ships and ferries in China. It is heading up interior design for SunStone Ships' newbuilds being built at China Merchants Industry Holdings' (CMIH) shipyard and is also playing an important role in Viking Line's newbuild project being built at Xiamen Shipbuilding.

Tomas Tillberg Design was awarded



ABOVE: The disappearance of business centres in cruise ships means spaces need to be provided where people can comfortably use their personal devices (credit: Tomas Tillberg Design)



Tomas Tillberg

(Tomas Tillberg Design) Tomas Tillberg was exposed to cruise ship design from an early age through the work of his father, Robert Tillberg. Mr Tillberg, an artist and designer, attended the Swedish Royal Academy of Arts and started his career doing painting commissions for private clients as well as working with his father and the team at Tillberg Design in Sweden. In addition to this work, Mr Tillberg spent many years establishing and managing a contracting firm which expanded into 21 countries. This experience in managing international projects was put to use later in helping his father to expand Tillberg Design. In 1996 Mr Tillberg moved to America to establish the offices of Tomas Tillberg Design in Florida.

the contract to design SunStone Ships' new expedition cruise ships following a decade-long relationship with the cruise operator.

Mr Tillberg elaborated "Chinese yards have not built cruise ships before but by bringing an experienced European contractor to CMIH we can deliver the interior a modern cruise ship should have."

He highlighted the great impact he believed China will have on cruise shipbuilding. "China is a new frontier for cruise shipping and for building cruise ships. The Chinese are making a serious effort to get into this market and are committed to staying for the long haul."

A team led by Tomas Tillberg Design managing partner Carlos H Reyes is responsible for the co-ordination between the shipyard, the outfitters and the architects when it comes to Viking Line's LNG-fuelled newbuild being built in Xiamen. Mr Reyes said "Our firm has been hired by the shipyard as part of the shipyard's team, led by project manager Mr Zeng. What is important is that all the pieces fit together in the puzzle in the best possible way and by working with the shipyard, outfitters and architect, we achieve the product Viking Line is expecting.

"The shipyard is capable enough of building a large ferry of this kind and a great team has been put together, consisting of very experienced companies, including Finland-based Deltamarin which is providing engineering and shipbuilding support services."

Using shipyards in China to build cruise ships and ferries is a trend Mr Tillberg is sure will continue. "Major cruise lines are expanding and European shipyards are full," he said.

As well as newbuilds, Mr Tillberg said an important part of Tomas Tillberg Design's work is refurbishment. "As more and more ships are delivered, there is more refurbishment needed, it is an on-going operation. With a newbuild, we have more time, so it is less of a challenge time-wise. On a refurbishment project, there is not very much time, we have to get everything together in short order, so our whole team really has to know what they are doing."

New materials, new possibilities

Trends for new materials within cruise and ferry interior design are gaining momentum. Highlighting the fast-moving nature of new trends, Tomas Tillberg Design lead designer and managing partner Nedgé Louis-Jacques and vice president of design Debbie Breslauer said "We

have about 400 suppliers and nearly every day people come to our office bringing new materials, which open up new possibilities for designs. It is always exciting to see these new developments and we appreciate the good relationship we have with all our suppliers."

They picked out an example: deck railings used to be made out of teak. "Teak is very expensive, it is hard to come by and has a very restricted market, therefore there has been a quest for alternative materials."

While decking switched from teak to synthetic material around 10 years ago, deck railings have only recently started being constructed in different materials. Ms Louis-Jacques and Ms Breslauer said that one option was railings from a German company using rice chaff. "It looks like teak but is cheaper, it is a really durable material that is maintenance free and environmentally friendly. It looks beautiful. When we saw it, we thought it was great for furniture but realised it would be perfect for railings as well.

"This is a great example of how new materials open possibilities and solve problems."

Technology trend

Another trend is the boom in using technology on board and its subsequent impact on the interiors. Mr Tillberg said "Previously, the cabin and TV in it were not so interesting – people wanted to be out of their cabins. The TV had to be there but not a lot of attention was paid to it. Nowadays the TV is a medium for information and sales. It's only one example of how technology has changed the functionality of an item in the cabin."

He added that while cruise ships used to have business centres, which were a "very important space", today guests have their own laptops and phones and can use them anywhere on board, "so business centres are disappearing".

While this frees up space, it means that spaces need to be provided where people can charge their appliances and sit and comfortably use their personal devices.

Technology has also had an impact on the management of Tomas Tillberg Design – for the better. "We all used to be based in the one office. Now we have a completely different type of organisation," said Mr Tillberg.

While the company's top designers are based in its headquarters in Florida, the project managers work in different locations around the world, and Tomas Tillberg Design has teams in France and Denmark, as well as in China and Colombia, which produces renderings and carries out production work. "Even though we are decentralised, our teams stay in contact in real-time via Skype and other resources. This modern way of operating makes our company more cost efficient, available and flexible," said Mr Tillberg. *PST*